MARK IZU

MEMORIAL TRIBUTE PERFORMANCE

A Sacred Journey Celebrating the Jazz Innovator

Saturday, May 24, 2025
2:00pm - 3:30pm
Herbst Theatre

401 Van Ness Ave. (at McAllister St.)
San Francisco, CA 94102

www.firstvoice.org/markizutribute

Made possible by friends, family and the City of San Francisco

BRENDA WONG AOKI & MARK IZU

First Voice

Dear Friends & Family,

Mark and I believe being a performing artist is a sacred calling—a divine responsibility to grow the light, especially in times of darkness.

The artists on stage and behind the curtain today are not just collaborators. They are family. Many have been with us for decades. We could not have done our life's work without them.

You—our families, our people, our community—are our inspiration.

We reflect your light, and when we do, the Light shines exponentially.

Mark deeply loved his son KK. They loved their father/son Japanese monster movie marathons watching Godzilla, Gidra and Mothra. To honor his father, KK wore Japanese monster tee shirts. Together, they'd go get extra crispy hash brown sandwiches at Art's Café on Irving Street. They continued that tradition every time KK came home to visit.

KK performed with us since he was a baby. He only left our act when he went to Stanford, where he met and married beautiful Geena and moved to Boston. Mark held on until we could fly there and hold our new granddaughter, Lucy. We made it home on Christmas Day. He entered hospice on New Year's Eve and passed on my mother's birthday—the only son-in-law she'd ever cook Chinese food for because, she said, "he appreciated it."

Now I see Mark's love in Lucy's eyes.

We thank the City of St. Francis for her brilliant sunsets, mystic fog, and the ancestors who still whisper encouragement in J-Town, Chinatown, and the Fillmore.

And we thank you—each one of you—for being here.

We are proud of the Aoki–Izu clan and what our families have contributed. And we thank our ancestors, who have been in this country since 1897, for walking with us still.

And we are proud of you. Look around you—you're sitting among giants: the student leaders of '68, the creators of Ethnic Studies, artists, educators, climate warriors, writers, healers, historians—our people.

Rejoice in each other. Life is so short.

With much love,

BRENDA WONG AOKI

Photos of Mark Izu by Mark Shigenaga

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Welcome	Eryn Kimura
Mayoral Commendation	Juslyn Manalo, Senior Community Engagement Specialist, City and County of San Francisco Kai Kāne Aoki Izu
Mark & JTown	Steve Nakajo
Christian Prayer	Reverend Hiroko Suzuki Christ United Presbyterian Church
Shinto Blessing	Kawahatsu Sensei Konko Church of San Francisco
First Light	poem by Genny Lim Poet Laureate of San Francisco
Buddhist Chant	dii, Joyce & Tomiyuri Lewis, Chizu Omori
I'll Be Seeing You	music by Sammy Fain, lyrics by Irving Kahal; Moy Eng (vocals) Brenda Wong Aoki (dance)
Mark's Medley	music by Mark Izu, arrangement by Mas Koga

Mas Koga (saxophones & shakuhachi), Kenneth Nash (percussion & vocals), Jimi Nakagawa (taiko), Lisa Mezzacappa (acoustic bass), Shoko Hikage (koto), Derek Nakamoto (keyboards), Sarah Sithi-Amnuai (trumpet)

Koi Dance	Ki' Shae Qetlah, Raychel Hatch music by Mas Koga
Legend of the Koi	words by Brenda Wong Aoki performed by devorah major
Dragon Dance	Kai Kāne Aoki Izu music by Mas Koga
Elegy for Mark	poem by devorah major
Mark's Movie	film by Emiko Omori
Dragon Family	Ki' Shae Qetlah, Raychel Hatch & Kai Kāne Aoki Izu music by Mas Koga
Brenda's Love Story	Brenda Wong Aoki music by Brenda Wong Aoki
Issei Crossing	music by Mark Izu, arrangement by Mas Koga digital collage by Andi Wong
Lucy's Lullabye	Brenda Wong Aoki & Company

MARK IZU was an Emmy Award–winning composer, musician, and pioneer of Asian American Jazz. For nearly five decades, he created a sound all his own by blending traditional Asian instruments with African American improvisation.

Born in Vallejo and raised in Seattle and Sunnyvale, Mark was a third-generation Japanese American whose family arrived from Fukuoka in 1897. His father served with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team; his mother was incarcerated at Poston. His brothers Dave and Tom continue the Japanese American legacy - as culture bearers and historians.

Mark studied music at San Francisco State and began training in the 1980s with Togi Suenobu, a master of Gagaku—the music and dance of the Sun Goddess, traditionally performed for the Japanese Emperor. He studied with Togi-Sensei until 2007, and developed a unique notation system bridging Japanese and Western music.

As Artistic Director of the Asian American Jazz Festival, Mark collaborated with Kent Nagano, Zakir Hussain, Cecil Taylor, Anthony Brown, Lewis Jordan, Kenny Endo, and Jon Jang. For larger works, Mas Koga served as his music director. Mark composed for film, theater, dance and museum installation —earning a Northern California Emmy for *Bolinao 52*—and co-founded First Voice with his wife and creative partner, Brenda Wong Aoki.

He is recognized in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians as a composer and founder of Asian American Jazz. Mark is remembered for his humility, joy, and love of sci-fi, Yosemite, spam musubi, and composing in Tibetan fox slippers. "Everyone carries light inside them," he said. "Our job is to uncover that light."

He is survived by Brenda, their son Kai Kāne Aoki Izu, daughter-in-law Geena Chen, granddaughter Lucy, and his brothers, Dave and his wife Evelyn, and Tom and his wife Susan.

LUCY'S LULLABYE

Music by Grandma Brenda

I am surrounded by love
I am surrounded by love
I am surrounded by love
I am surrounded by love

Cold winds will blow,
Mountains will fall,
Darkness will cover the skies
Still I know, I will glow

'Cause I am surrounded by love

Use the QR code to access the full digital program for performer biographies, production credits and shared memories of Mark from First Voice family and friends.

MARK IZU TRIBUTE TEAM

Writer, Artistic Director	Brenda Wong Aoki
Director	Emiko Omori
Music Director	Mas Koga
Choreographer	Claudine Naganuma
Lighting Designer	Kate Boyd
Costume Designer	Lydia Tanji
Multimedia Designer	Andi Wong
Photographer	Mark Shigenaga
Floral Designer	Hiroko Tsunetsugu
Production Manager	Jocelyn Fabello
Stage Manager	Isa Musni
Assistant Stage Manager	Cole Tanigawa
House Manager	Jennifer Tait
Production Assistants	Ann Cruz, Noelle Hada, Ken Jew
First Voice	Jocelyn Fabello, Managing Director Jennie Legary, Marketing Tiara Rumantier, Event Assistant
Community Coordinators	Donna Kotake, Dean Ito Taylor, Nikki Yoshikawa, Grace Horikiri

Special thanks to

Herbst Theatre and Green Room, Masae Aitoku, Ed Fonseca, Richard Okiuye, SooJin Wong, Kenneth Chow, Ben Krames, Scott Marlowe, Rebeka Rodriguez, Renee Baldocci, Jenny Leung, Barbara Mumby

Video: *Waterfalls* by Michael Shainblum Photographer; *Tree of Life* by Olivia Ting

Photos: Tom & Dave Izu, Bob Hsiang, Mark Shigenaga & First Voice Archives

"Mark's Movie" excerpts:

ILLUMINATE, Stories of AAPI, YMCA of San Francisco Film

Don't Lose Your Soul, The Music of Anthony Brown & Mark Izu
Center for Asian American Media

Outside in Sight, the music of United Front
Produced and Directed by Greg Chapnick & Sharon Wood
Woodnick Productions

Seven Steps to Go
Intersection for the Arts, Valencia Street, SF
1987 *SoundSeen*

Adventures in Music, YMCA of San Francisco Film

Uncle Gunjiro's Girlfriend

Kuan-yin: Our Lady of Compassion

Asian Pacific America
KNTV

MU

Songs for J-Town

BRENDA WONG AOKI, Wife, Artistic Director

Brenda Wong Aoki grew up the eldest daughter of six children, in a working-class neighborhood of mixed-race families just like her's. Of Japanese, Chinese, Spanish and Scottish ancestry, her work explores the fundamental hybridity of U.S. culture. She is an award winning, internationally renowned storyteller, playwright, producer, director, and performer. Known for her agility across disciplines, she creates works for theater, symphony, contemporary dance, world music, taiko, jazz ensemble, live performance with film & interactive museum installation. Her grandfather, Rev. Chojiro Aoki, was a founder of America's first Japantown in the 1800's. Her grandmother was a founder of the first Chinatown Garment Union. Her works are drawn from her family's 127-year history in San Francisco, her training in Noh & Kyogen, and her lived experience. Awards include Hollywood-Dramalogue, Critics Circle, Dramatist Guild, ASCAP and INDIE Awards, and fellowships from the NEA and the Japanese Government. As the first nationally recognized Asian Pacific storyteller in the U.S., Aoki's work is part of the American Folklife Collection at the Library of Congress. In 1997 she co-founded First Voice, one of only two organizations in the nation dedicated to presenting, producing and perpetuating the stories and new genre performance of intercultural people. Brenda has been an artist in residence at over 100 universities worldwide. She was a UC Regents Scholar, taught one of the first Asian American Women's Studies Class at SF State and is a founding faculty member of the Institute for Diversity in the Arts at Stanford University. In 2024, she premiered *Soul of the City*, a Hewlett 50 Theater Commission. In 2025, she received the Rainin Theater Fellowship.

KAI KĀNE AOKI IZU, Son, Dancer

Kai Kāne Aoki Izu is the son of Mark Izu and Brenda Wong Aoki. For the past 23 years, KK's been a part of his parent's productions starting with his international debut in Hong Kong when he was 6 years old. KK has had the pleasure of being his parents' roadie, kitchen utensil percussionist, dancer, and unofficial artistic director. KK studied ballet and modern dance at ODC and Lines Ballet, and annually marched in SF's carnival with Loco Bloco. KK resides in Greater Boston Massachusetts with his wife and 6 month old where he works as a product manager at Kickstarter. Outside of work, KK's an avid gardener, EV enthusiast, and home improvement DIYer.

KATE BOYD, Lighting Designer

Kate Boyd designs scenery and lighting in the Bay Area. She recently designed the lights for *Justice* at Marin Theatre Company and scenery for *The Language of Wild Berries* for Golden Thread. Recent Aurora shows include *Born with Teeth*, *Hurricane Diane* and *Everything is Illuminated*. She has also designed at Center Rep, Magic Theater, New Conservatory Theater, Merola Opera, the SF Conservatory of Music, Company C Ballet and Theaterworks. Kate is a resident artist with Golden Thread Productions and a recipient of the Gerbode Design Fellowship. Kate teaches stagecraft and design at Lick-Wilmerding High School.

MOY ENG, Vocalist

Moy Eng is a poet, lyricist, and vocalist. Moy writes poetry and in collaboration with Wayne Wallace, songs, which were showcased in their album, *The Blue Hour*. She has performed with First Voice, Kenny Endo, Mas Koga, Rick Vandivier, Frank Martin, and Deszon Claiborne, among others. Moy has appeared at the Red Poppy Art House, Throckmorton, Yoshi's and Monterey Jazz Festival. Moy's arts practice is multimodal, spanning a career in performance as well as philanthropy and administration. She has played diverse roles in increasing greater investment in American arts and culture at organizations such as the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Alvin Ailey, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST). As founding CEO of CAST, Moy raised $50mm to create an artist-centered real estate development venture that has inspired CAST-like initiatives in the US, Canada, UK, and Australia.

RAYCHEL HATCH, Dancer

Raychel Hatch is a movement artist based in the Bay Area. Her creative world explores interconnectedness, identity, and community building. Her personal dance style is rooted in contemporary choreography and floorwork –drawing inspiration from street style dance forms, cultural background, and embellished gestures. She holds a B.A. in Performing Arts & Social Justice, with a concentration in dance, and a B.A. in Psychology from University of San Francisco. She has worked with the Dance Generators, Robert Moses, First Voice, dNaga Dance, Tracey Lindsay Chan and ODC's Pilot 74 mentorship program. She is currently in the process of earning her M.A. in Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University.

SHOKO HIKAGE, Koto

Koto (Japanese zither) player Shoko Hikage is grateful to have studied with wonderful teachers, Chizuga Kimura, Iemoto Seiga Adachi, Tadao and Kazue Sawai and more. She, Mark, and Brenda have worked together on *Aunt Lily's Flower book* (2017~) *Uncle Gunjiro's Girlfriend* (2016), *Suite J-town* (2015), *Mu* (2013), *Kabuki Jazz Cabaret* (2011) and more projects. Hikage is grateful to have had valuable experiences from those great projects which continue to be a great influence on her music.

ERYN KIMURA, Emcee

eryn kimura (she, they) is a mixed media artist, community builder, and auntie based on the unceded territory of the ramaytush-speaking ohlone people (the 415). using fragments from print media and found ephemera, eryn composes cacophonous yet fractal visual symphonies - collage - that recontextualize the asian american experience in popular culture/memory. using collage as play and alchemy, eryn reimagines and archives ancestral pasts and futures of the sucka free (san francisco) and beyond. in 2023, eryn produced their first short documentary *BENKYODO: the last manju shop in j-town* (directed by tadashi nakamura and akira boch), which captures the last 6 months of san francisco japantown's first and last traditional japanese american confectionery after 115 years of service. eryn kimura is a fifth

generation san franciscan, and currently is the associate director of community resiliency programs at san francisco's oldest black-led and serving organization, booker t. washington community service center.

MAS KOGA, Music Director, Saxophones and Shakuhachi

Saxophonist, flautist, and composer Mas Koga has been a long time friend of First Voice who has also worked domestically and internationally with luminaries such as Akira Tana, Anthony Brown, Wayne Wallace, Kenny Endo, and the late Fred Ho, as well as his mentors Hafez Modirzadeh and Royal Hartigan. As a composer his original music has been featured in numerous shows and projects including *Soul of the City* (2023/2024) and San Francisco Silent Film Festival. Being a Shin-Issei who grew up as a Third Culture Kid, his music encompasses the many cultural traditions that he has been touched by, and the worldview developed through diverse life experiences. www.maskoga.com

GENNY LIM, Poet

Genny Lim is the 9th San Francisco Poet Laureate, a recipient of two lifetime achievement awards from PEN Oakland and city of Berkeley and a former San Francisco Jazz Poet Laureate. She is author of five poetry collections and *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island*, winner of the American Book Award. Lim's play, *Paper Angels*, was the first Asian American play aired on PBS's American Playhouse in 1985 and has been performed throughout the U.S., Canada and China. She has worked with past Jazz legends, Max Roach, Herbie Lewis and local musicians, Jon Jang, John Santos, Destiny Muhammad, Marcus Shelby and Francis Wong.

DEVORAH MAJOR, Poet

A California granddaughter of immigrants, documented and undocumented. A baker of pies and lover of jazz, her poetry has carried her to many countries where she has performed with and without musicians. In 2022 she received Italy's Regina Coppola International Literary Award. In 2025 City Lights Publishing will release her eighth book of poetry, *"word time."* She has worked with First Voice on several projects including Mark Izu's *Song for JTown* and Brenda Wong Aoki's *Soul of the City*. She will put down her pen to march, act and call for justice.

LISA MEZZACAPPA, Acoustic Bass

Berkeley-based composer, bassist and producer Lisa Mezzacappa has been active in the Bay Area music community for more than 20 years. Her activities as a composer and ensemble leader include ethereal chamber music, electro-acoustic works, avant-garde jazz, music for groups from duo to large ensemble, and collaborations with film, dance, and visual art. Recent projects include *Cosmicomics*, a suite for electro-acoustic jazz sextet based on Italo's Calvino's stories about the origins of the cosmos; and the serial audio opera

The Electronic Lover. She is a recipient of the Pauline Oliveros New Genres Prize from the International Alliance for Women in Music (IAWM), and has been commissioned by the San Francisco Girls Chorus and Del Sol Quartet.

CLAUDINE NAGANUMA, Choreographer

Claudine Naganuma (she/her-choreographer) is the director of dNaga Dance Co. Her work pulls from the power of creativity and employs art as a tool for healing. Claudine Naganuma grew up in San Francisco and studied Poetry at Dominican and Choreography at Mills College. She served as the Artistic Director of Asian American Dance Performances and was a founding BOD member of the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center. She served as the director of Danspace where her company dNaga continues to offer dance classes for people with Parkinson's disease. She is currently on staff at EastSide Cultural Center where she founded GIRL Project, an art and empowerment workshop for middle school girls. She believes in the power of creativity as a tool for healing and liberation. (www.dNaga.org)

JIMI NAKAGAWA, Taiko

Born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, Jimi Nakagawa joined the San Francisco Taiko Dojo, directed by Grand Master Seiichi Tanaka and became a performing member in the late 80's. In Japan, Jimi studied and performed Taiko with Sukeroku Daiko Hozonkai and Master Kenjiro Maru of the Wakayama style festival music. Also, he studied "tsuzumi (a Japanese hand drum)" with Master Saburo Mochizuki to become "Natori (accredited master)" and received a name, 望月武響 (Bukyo Mochizuki). In addition to Japanese traditional music, Jimi is a jazz drummer who studied with Robert Kaufman, a former professor at the Berklee College of Music. He is one of the founding members of Somei Yoshino Taiko Ensemble, a San Francisco Bay Area based taiko group and played in the group for 11 years. Jimi has collaborated with world renowned musicians like Peter Erskine, Nguyen Le, Frank Martin, Van Anh Vo, Akira Tana & Otonowa to name a few. Jimi's refined but driving stickwork has been featured in film, video, and on stage.

DEREK NAKAMOTO, Keyboards

Derek Nakamoto's distinguished career as a Record Producer, Composer and Arranger spans over 45 years. Notable works include co-writing Hiroshima's signature song "Thousand Cranes," Teddy Pendergrass' *Truly Blessed* and Contemporary Jazz Artist Keiko Matsui. He produced albums for Yoko Fujimoto (from Kodo) morisa komorisa and Angolan Legend Waldemar Bastos *Classics of My Soul*, featuring the London Symphonic Orchestra. Most recent is co-producing Nobuko Miyamoto's *120,000 Stories* for Smithsonian/Folkways. Derek has scored *An American Story: Norman Mineta And His Legacy*, *100 Years From Mississippi*, *Anime Films with Marth* with the Czech National Symphonic Orchestra and *Nobuko Miyamoto: A Song In Movement* for PBS SoCal.

KENNETH NASH, Percussion and Vocals

Internationally renowned producer, arranger, musician, author, and teacher Kenneth Nash is creating some of today's most rhythmically compelling music. Breaking out into a superbly syncopated realm all of his own, his high energy innovative playing has earned him a reputation as one of the foremost percussionists in jazz and contemporary music. Kenneth Nash has composed and arranged percussion pieces for the Joffrey Ballet, The San Francisco Opera, and American Conservatory Theatre. He has written and performed music for films, television and theatre. Nash received the Isadora Duncan Award in the same year his book *Rhythms Talk* was released worldwide.

EMIKO OMORI, Director

Emiko Omori began her career as a filmmaker and cinematographer in 1968, when there were few camerawomen and fewer still Asian American cinematographers. Her first job was as camera/editor on the KQED program, *Newsroom*, in San Francisco. She has freelanced as a producer, director, cinematographer, and editor on many award-winning films, taught, and traveled extensively with her work in addition to making her own films. Her Emmy award winning documentary *Rabbit in the Moon* premiered at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival. Her ground-breaking documentaries include *Tattoo City* (1980), *To Chris Marker, An Unsent Letter* (2013); and *Vanishing Chinatown: The World of The May's Photo Studio* (2020).

KI' SHAE QETLAH, Dance Artist

Ki' Shae is a multi-disciplinary Artist called to express herself with movement in her formative years. She first began traditional African Dance and Martial Arts at five years of age. She then trained with Derrick Minter of Ailey II, Denise Vale from the Martha Graham Dance Company and Mary Margaret Holt of Houston Ballet at the University of Oklahoma. She went on to join the University of Oklahoma Ballet Performance and Pedagogy Program, where she danced with the Oklahoma Festival Ballet. Ki'Shae is a Faculty Member for the ODC Youth & Teen Dance Program and at Sunset Movement Arts. She has danced with the Kendra Kimbrough Dance Ensemble and is a company member for RammDance & Tim Rubel HumanShakes. Ki' Shae's desires in her dance practice are most fully realized through the art of storytelling, in the pursuit of continued peace, and in human connection.

MARK SHIGENAGA, Photographer

Mark Shigenaga is a third-generation Japanese American with a passion for supporting community activities through photography. This pursuit has deepened an understanding of his heritage and enabled a connection to many cultures. A chance alignment at the 2013 San Jose Obon led to a commission from Mark and Brenda to photograph their work *MU* later that year, followed by continued documentation of many First Voice performances. While his photographic style continues to evolve, he is most inspired by images that portray the vibrancy and soul of our collective communities, whether through the sharing of various art forms, celebrations, or remembrances.

SARA SITHI-AMNUAI, Trumpet

Sara Sithi-Amnuai is a multi-instrumentalist (on trumpet, flugelhorn, sheng, and some handcrafted electronic instruments) born in Sydney, Australia and based in Los Angeles, California. Her interest in the cultural design of interfaces inspired her to create several gestural interfaces including Nami, a custom built glove interface designed for live musical performance inspired by Nikkei community research. She has presented her work at the International Conference on New Interfaces for Musical Expression, received the 2021 Nikkei Music Reclamation Fellowship with Sustainable Little Tokyo, 2019 ASCAP Foundation Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Award, and is part of the musical duo claymaker.

LYDIA TANJI, Costume Designer

Costume Designer Lydia Tanji is thrilled to be working with Brenda and Mark again. Past productions include: Kuan Yin, Mermaid, and Type O. Other theater credits: ACT, Berkeley Rep. Theater, Theatreworks, Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, Syracuse Stage, Arena Stage, Huntington Theater, Guthrie, Indiana Rep., Dallas Theater, Children's Theater, Seattle Rep, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Mark Taper Forum, and South Coast Rep. Film credits include: *The Joy Luck Club*, *Hot Summer Winds*, *Dim Sum*, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and *The Wash*. She also co-produced *Vanishing Chinatown: The World of The May's Photo Studio* which aired on KQED and KVIE.

HIROKO TSUNETSUGU, Floral Designer

Artist/designer Hiroko Tsunetsugu creates elegant and refined installations, objects, and garments using textiles, flowers, and other natural materials. Whether functional and built to last or ephemeral and decorative, Hiroko's meticulously hand-crafted creations are guided by her Japanese roots and the unique attributes of the materials at hand. Soon after arriving in the United States, Hiroko crafted stage elements for First Voice productions of *Kuan Yin* and *Mermaid* thanks to an introduction from her mentor Maria Vella. Nearly a quarter of a century later, she is pleased and proud to continue collaborating with First Voice's family of Asian-American creators.

ANDI WONG, Multimedia Designer

Fifth-generation Chinese American Andi Wong has designed graphics and multimedia for First Voice projects, including *J-Town Culture Bearers* (2019), *Earth Dance Offerings* (2020), *Story Circle of the Japanese Diaspora* (2021-2024), *Song for J-Town* (2022) and *Soul of the City* (2023 & 2024). Her creative partners include Marcus Shelby, The Last Hoisan Poets (Genny Lim, Flo Oy Wong and Nellie Wong), Del Sol Quartet, and the Internet Archive. She created the film, *Drawn from Life: The Creative Legacy of Flo Oy Wong* for CATS, curated the companion exhibit for Huang Ruo's *Angel Island* premiere at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music), and designed *Nothing Like Freedom,* a book of poetry by Nellie Wong, and the cd recording of Mark Izu's *Songs for J-Town,* his 2022 live concert dedicated to our grandchildren's children and the ancestors who carry them.

FIRST LIGHT
by Genny Lim

For Mark and Brenda

The day after you passed
I sat by my window and watched
The Wolf Moon gazing
from under the Bay Bridge
So still! So calm and bright
Separating darkness from light
Separating you from us
You could not see it rise or fall
Just like life
You sailed through
the river of night into its light!
Oh such bliss, such brightness
We squander in ignorance
Only those who ascend know!

© 2025 Genny Lim

THE KOI & THE DRAGON

In Chinese mythology, ***Longmen*** (lit. 登龍門 "Dragon Gate") is located at the top of a waterfall cascading from a legendary mountain. The legend states that while many carp swim upstream against the river's strong current, few are capable or brave enough for the final leap over the waterfall. If a carp successfully makes the jump, it is transformed into a powerful dragon that takes flight.

Dragon flying above turbulent waves (c.1831)
by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861)

ELEGY FOR MARK

by devorah major

The 13th century Sufi poet Rumi wrote:
"You are not a drop in the ocean; you are the ocean in a drop."
for the ocean who was Mark Izu

life's cycles are miracles every day
no less incredible for their regularity

as the fiery stillness of the sun
is a miracle every time
we orbit around and see it rise
circle below and see it set

two million to one odds
that that one egg
will be fertilized
by that one sperm
growing from zygote to embryo to fetus
while swimming in an amniotic ocean
sprouting spirit and limbs

a life created because of and despite
the struggles of its ancestors
a life created because of and through
the traumas of its parents

and that child may find himself in a land
of concrete and metal that spurns him
because of the hue he carries
the genealogy he praises
the history he reflects

but he transmutes this hate
and stirred with the love of family
Mark finds a bass
and wraps his arms around its ribs
tunes it silk ended strings
bows plucks vibrates
and strums its music

then he embraces the sho
with its millennia of history
and learns to intone
the phoenix's majestic song
through is seventeen bamboo pipes
he unites with others to create
soothing balms and awakening rhythms
and when betrayed he washes off the mud
and creates more music that reveals
a depth of love
for family
for community
for this planet
full of the majesty of ingenuity
and the despair of destruction

Mark's miracle of life
wed with another creating
mating and procreating with love and fidelity
and becoming stronger as he swam upstream

in a land that gives difficult lessons
on belonging and rejection
betrayal and redemption
he embraced and honored all cultures
while uplifting his own

and
while growing an illness to which he succumbed
perhaps because of holding in his grief for the world

never alone with his glistening scales
playing in both minor and major chords
he swam up an ever steeper cascade

a golden musical koi climbing the waterfall of life
transforming to dragon soaring through the heavens

© 2025 devorah major

BRENDA'S LOVE STORY
by Brenda Wong Aoki

It's been so strange since Mark died. People keep asking me how I'm doing? I have no idea, my husband never died before. I think I'm okay – then a complete stranger will come up and hug me - crying! (*face*) I don't know if I'm having a senior moment - maybe they're Mark's friends, or maybe it's one of you who've been coming to our shows for 50 years and you know *me* but … So I just hug back.

Mark passed on my mother's birthday – in this cute little place in the Castro that used to be a nunnery. During the AIDS crisis, it became a hospice. Each room has its own mural – hand painted on all fourMark passed on my mother's birthday – in this cute little place in the Castro that used to be a nunnery. During the AIDS crisis, it became a hospice. Each room has its own mural – hand painted on all four sides - of a garden with flowers, drifting clouds. Each room has a window that looks out to the open sky. Only 12 beds! And lots of loving staff. Standing on my tippy toes, on Mark's bed, trying not to step on him, I glued glow-in-the dark stars to the ceiling. Much to the chagrin of our son KK, "Mah, you're 72 years old – what if you fall?"

KK and I picked Mark's room because it was the closest to what used to be the chapel. With stained glass windows on three sides, Mark loved sitting there in the afternoons. I played the piano and he'd watch rainbow sunbeams dance into the room. It was peaceful. But once KK told everyone that Mark was in hospice - we got busy. People came from all parts of his life! People bumped into friends they hadn't seen in years. Everyone started to hang out in that chapel. The hospice people said they'd never seen a patient with so many friends! Mark's pretty pinay nurse told me "You know, some people are scared before they die cuz they don't know where they're going but Mark doesn't seem to worry." I told her, (*laughing*) that's cuz Mark goes up there all the time. He likes it up there.

Mark (*shake head remembering*) - We'd be at Safeway, in the check-out line! Standing there in his shocking pink Levi jacket, in one of the Godzilla tee shirts he liked to wear in honor of the Japanese monster-movie marathons he'd watch with KK - he'd be doing this (*gesture*). He was composing! He once told me "The music's always playing - you just gotta be ready to pull it down."

After he died, that same sweet little nurse told us, "I've been helping people die here for 17 years but I've never seen anyone die more at peace than Mark Izu. When I die - I want to go just like him!"

We were getting so comfy in that place, we almost forgot why we were there. Mark's buddy, Young, came every day! Then one day, he said to me, "Brenda, Mark doesn't look so good." So I asked Mark, "Do you want me to tell people not to come? Maybe take a break"; but Mark said, (*smiling*) "No… it's fun." I realized I was alone with him - Maybe I should say the things I've left unsaid. But I talk a lot so what haven't I said? … I apologized—for all the times I talked stink about him. I mean, cmon! 50 years, 24/7, glued to the hip? Who does that? You're bound to get on each other's nerves sometimes!

I apologized for making him propose to me twice: The first time was at Spenger's, in the Filipino room! At the bar - in the dark - on those high chairs you have to hoist yourself up in to sit? Mark pulled out a green plastic Easter egg (*shaking sound*) It's got something in it. (*shaking sound - Mark*) "Open it up."(*shaking sound*) It's got a ring inside – this ring actually (*points to ring*).

Mark: "That's my grandma's wedding ring."

Brenda: "Oh…How come she didn't get buried with it?"

Mark: Cuz when she died, we took it off her finger and gave it to my mom.

Brenda: Oooh…How come she didn't get buried with it?

Mark: Cuz when she died, we took it off her finger, and now I'm givin' it to you.

Brenda: Eeeh, eeh, eeeew! No, you have to do this again.

The next time we're in Hawaii hiking in the Ko'olau. Mark's in shorts. He gets down in the mud on his knees. What are you doing? He pulls out that green plastic Easter egg again. (*shaking sound*) "This good enough?"

We eloped then and there! Got married in Kauai, by the Hawaiian Minister, at that little white church in Koloa? (*gestures "you know the one"*) His wife told us to get our marriage license at Slim's Appliance. "You can't miss it—it's down the main road with all the used washers and dryers out front."

We drove up – washing machines, dryers and a line of people out the door. Wow, lots of people getting married!

Turns out it was the first of the month. Everyone was cashing their welfare checks!

We get in line - the locals ask, "Why you folks here?"

"We're getting our marriage license."

"Oh dah, cute –- let'em in the front of the line! Dey getting married!"

Pushed to the front, we arrive at a Japanese lady sitting at a desk. Betty. She starts filling out our paperwork.

"Okay, who's your witness?"

"Witness?"

"Dat's okay —I'll be your witness."

She shows up at our wedding and cried! (*so sweet memory*)

I wore a triple X mumu I got on sale at Hilo Hatties. I kept that green mumu for years – wore it as a nightie. I'd tell Mark, "It's our wedding night again!"

All through chemo and radiation, Mark kept telling his nurses that he was going to Hawaii. So when he finished, I took him. I didn't know it would be our last vacation. We went back to that little church in Koloa—and the Hawaiian minister who married us was still there!

We went back to Hilo Hatties. But this time, instead of tour buses, the parking lot was full of chickens. After Hurricane Iniki, all the chickens got loose - now the official mascot of Kauai is the Rooster! One of my last happy photos of Mark is from that vacation. He's standing there in Hilo Hatties, holding two stuffed roosters. He wanted me to take his picture for KK and Geena cuz they're both Year of the Rooster.

I rubbed Mark's bald head and told him what an incredible life we've had. Traveling all over the world, meeting kings and queens, making friends with tribal chiefs, medicine people, hanging out with living treasures. All because we were telling stories and playing music! And our most *amazing creation of all* was KK. And now he and Geena brought us baby Lucy!

I rubbed Mark's tummy, sang him *Lucy's Lullaby*, told him I loved him, kissed him and left the room to greet some more friends but his nurse came running after me."Hurry!" she said, "he's Going!" Going? Going where? I don't remember much what happened after that. Suddenly,

everybody was patting me on the back. Emiko appeared out of nowhere, and she was crying! Why was Em crying? I was trying to tell everyone not to worry - - Mark just sleeping, see his hands are still warm! Then KK texted, "Mah – is everything okay?"

When KK was a baby, Mark told me to watch KK's little toes and if they started to wiggle KK needed us. He said babies can't talk, but they tell you in other ways and crying is their last resort. So we always watched his toes, and KK hardly ever cried.

Mark was a good father but whoooah - so many "Earth to Mark. Earth to Mark".

I remember coming home. Exhausted. I'd told stories to thousands of people in three different states. Climbing the stairs in our flat - I hear KK's little baby voice. Candles everywhere! Mark made me a candlelight dinner! How sweet! I hugged my boys and sit down to eat. KK's swinging his little legs in his high chair chanting "no light! no light!" Candlelight K-boos, Candlelight! When supper was over I say, "OK guys, let's turn on the lights and cleanup." Mark said, "Can't." (*I say*,) "Why not?" Forgot to pay PG&E and KK said "No light No light!"

I knew Mark for 10 years before we started dating, he was my best friend. I'd tell him everything - my boyfriend troubles. He'd listen. He was like a little brother to me – he's a whole year younger! He was the musician all us dancers could count on to make music for us.

Mark was working at Kimochi nutrition - a van driver. I was at Nihonmachi Little friends - a preschool teacher. But after work - we were artists!

We were always together creating something but I remember when it happened. We'd been rehearsing - and went outside to get some sun. Sitting on these two benches facing each other - Mark stretched out on his (*show*). His shirt came untucked and that's when I noticed - he had a furry tummy. I like furry tummies! But Mark Izu's my little brother - but he has a furry tummy. Suddenly I realized *he was kinda cute*, but he didn't seem to notice me. I dropped hints - Mark's oblivious. Weeks went by. Oh my gawd, I'm just gonna have to jump his bones!

Back then, he was living in a bicycle shop in the Sunset. In a storage loft overlooking the bicycles. I had the key. One night I snuck in when he was at a United Front rehearsal. I thought - I 'll just wait for him. Where's his bed? *EEEWW!* It was an old moldy mattress with a gross sleeping bag on top. No no no! I went home.

Got clean sheets, a candle, flowers. I went back to his place, took off the sleeping bag, put on the sheets, arranged the flowers, lit the candles, got naked and waited. Should I look like this? Try to be sexy? Pretend to be asleep? Hours went by (*snores*) – what's taking him so long? (*shivering*) I should have brought my jammies! I hear his key in the lock, suddenly I thought – what if he wasn't with the guys? What if he was on a date? What if he's bringing her here? I heard footsteps on the stairs - I jump out of bed, wrap the sheets around me – I look like an egg with daikon ashi. Thank God, he's alone. He gives me that shit eatin' grin, "Hey Bren, what ya doing?"

"I was trying to look sexy…"

"You look sexy enough to me.."

And after that, well, Mark Izu wasn't my little brother anymore.

Mark loved light – he told me our job as artists is to uncover the light. Everyone has it - it just gets covered by the soot of life sometimes. In his childhood home, his mother kept a crystal in the window over the kitchen sink. When his parents died and they sold the family home, Mark put that crystal in his music room. In the mornings, he'd show KK, the rainbows it cast on our hardwood floors.

On the 49th day after Mark passed. I felt a change. I'm not Buddhist but I know the 49th day is a big deal. So I asked dii and Joyce to take me to the Berkeley Buddhist Temple. Joyce texted that they were outside and that's when I saw one of Mark's rainbows! Glowing – mostly red, shaped like a heart. Strange because the door to his office was nearly closed - yet big and clear the heart shaped rainbow was there - pulsing. Then it slowly stopped beating, and gradually faded away… and I realized Mark wanted me to understand he was different now.

Oh Mark, where did you go? Everything in our flat seems to be wondering when you're coming home. Your faithful bass sits in the corner facing the wall, she looks like she's crying. Your sho is silent. Every morning, I go into the kitchen and our trusty old coffee grinder stands at the ready waiting for you. You made the best coffee in San Francisco! Every night we'd fall asleep holding hands. Now I reach over to your side of the bed and try to remember your big warm hand holding mine. I miss you! I need a hug.

Quantum Physicists say all we are is dancing nothingness… our bodies water and bits of stardust. Maybe we're not really mammals, maybe we're plants…flowers… passing on our seed and blowing away with the wind.

I love you Mark Izu, you're my best friend, my bass player holding it down so I was free to be me. I know you're still with me; you're just playing a different rhythm – in a different frequency so I can't see you.

But I will feel your touch in the breeze, your smile in the sunshine and your love in the sparkle of Lucy's eyes.

Thank you, husband - we had a wonderful life.

SPECIAL THANKS

With deepest gratitude to Mas Koga, Emiko Omori, Andi Wong & Young Wong, Joyce Oishii, dii Lewis, Tomi & Kaz Lewis, Lydia Tanji & Roger Garcia, Wylie Wong, Donna Fujii, Lewis Kawahara, Akiko Takeshita, Doug & Paula Hayase Ota, Nancy Ukai, Masako Takahashi, Rick Wiebe, Ellen Heffelfinger, Hiroko Takano & Jimi Nakagawa, devorah major & Michelle Mouton, and Wendy Slick—who were with me every step of the way, from Mark's bedside until now.

To Jocelyn Fabello, who stood by Mark and me through thick and thin, and fearlessly produced this tribute with extraordinary care.

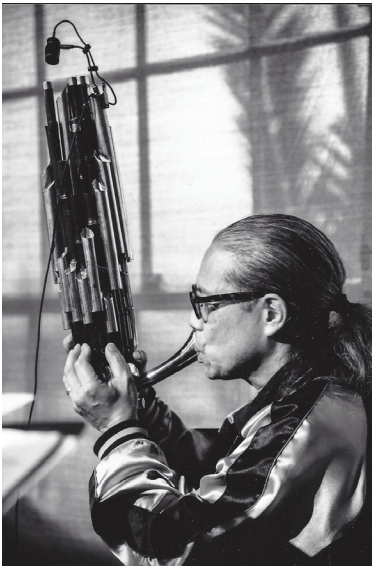
To Dean Ito Taylor, Nikki Yoshikawa, Jen Tait, and the Tanigawa–Lau family, who came all the way from Hawai'i to help both in front and behind the scenes.

And to all the artists, volunteers, and family who helped carry this vision into the light—thank you.

To my siblings, thank you for being here.
To cousin Edie Mitko and the Aoki Clan.

To the spirits of Togi-Sensei, Janice Mirikitani & Cecil Williams, George Yoshida, George Yamasaki, to Mark and my parents.

And to our son Kai Kāne, who has always been me and Mark's sun— to my daughter-in-law Geena and to Lucy, our granddaughter, born just in time to remind me that joy still rises.



(Clockwise, from top left): Mas Koga and Mark Izu; Mark plays his sho; *Soul of the City* 2024 featuring Mark on bass and Shoko Hikagi on koto, ; Janice Mirikatani, Reverend Cecil Williams, KK, Geena, Brenda and Mark, Mark playing at the Asian American Jazz Festival.

Photos by Bob Hsiang

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The San Francisco War Memorial acknowledges that we are on the unceded ancestral home land of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.

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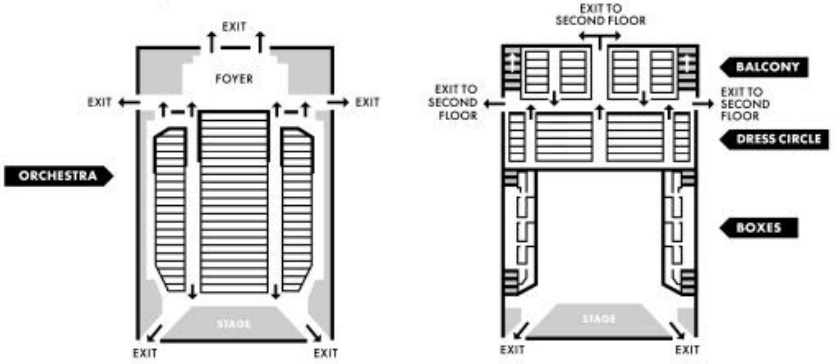

Since 1976 Brenda Wong Aoki and Mark Izu have played a central role in the evolution of Asian American Art. They founded First Voice in 1997, with a mission to create, present and contribute the stories and music of people living between worlds. Critical to this mission is "personal experience" or "voice" - essential to the authentic representation of the people of the United States. **firstvoice.org**